Republicans want Musk to shut up about Social Security

by Alexander Bolton -

Senate Republicans want Elon Musk to stop talking about Social Security, and the Department of Government Efficiency to leave it alone.

Musk's statement that Social Security is a "Ponzi scheme," and his plans to cut up to 12 percent of the Social Security Administration's workforce, are giving GOP lawmakers heartburn.

They warn that Social Security reform is known as the "third rail" of politics for a reason: Any party that touches it is likely to get zapped come Election Day.

And Republicans fear that reductions in staff and field offices will boomerang on them, predicting constituents will grow frustrated if it becomes more difficult and time-consuming to address problems related to benefit claims.

"It doesn't help the president when you have somebody who clearly is not worried about whether or not Social Security benefits are going to be there for him" leading the effort to shrink the Social Security Administration, said Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), referring to Musk, the world's richest person.

“It worries Americans all over the country,” she said of people who rely on Social Security benefits to live day to day. “This is why Social Security has been kind of viewed as the untouchable from a political perspective, and why the president made very clear we’re not dealing with Social Security.”

She said Musk’s claim that Social Security is a “Ponzi scheme” and rife with fraud “doesn’t do anything to calm the anxiety of people who are already anxious about what’s going on with some of the safety-net programs.”

Musk declared “Social Security is the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time” during a three-hour interview with Joe Rogan this month.

And Monday, he claimed without evidence that immigrants who are living in the country illegally are reaping fraudulent benefits from both Social Security and Medicare.

“By using entitlements fraud, the Democrats have been able to attract and retain vast numbers of illegal immigrants,” Musk said on Sen. Ted Cruz’s (R-Texas) podcast, accusing Democrats of buying voters.

“Basically bring in 10 [million], 20 million people who are beholden to the Democrats for government handouts and will vote overwhelmingly Democrats, as has been demonstrated in California,” he said.

Several other Republican senators said Musk should stop talking about Social Security and steer his budget-cutting team at DOGE in a different direction.

“He should zip it on that. It’s not helpful. It plays right into Democrats’ hands; they want to talk about Social Security cuts, Medicare cuts, Medicaid cuts. We don’t. The president does not want to talk about that. He’s against all those things,” said a Republican senator who requested anonymity to voice frustration about Musk’s rhetoric on Social Security.

The senator said it would be OK to talk about cracking down on fraud in the system but warned “when you start making it sound like you’re questioning the foundation of the Social Security system, that’s not helpful.”

In an interview with Fox Business host Larry Kudlow earlier this month, Musk suggested that $500 billion to $700 billion in waste could be cut from federal entitlement programs.

“Most of the federal spending is entitlements,” he said. “That’s the big one to eliminate.”

Ross K. Baker, a professor of political science at Rutgers University, said Musk’s statements about Social Security are becoming a political liability for Republicans.

“Going after the United States Institute of Peace is one thing, going after Social Security is something entirely different. It’s really poking a stick into a hornet’s nest,” he said.

“The ironies of a person of such immense wealth targeting a program that provides a modest benefit to ordinary people as the worst possible aura about it,” he said.

Musk’s comments gave Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (N.Y.) something to talk about last week when Senate Democrats were deeply divided over a House-passed government funding bill.

Schumer last week repeatedly assailed Musk’s comments on Social Security and accused the Trump administration of harboring plans to cut the popular program.

“Elon Musk is saying it plainly: Republicans’ big goal is to ‘eliminate,’ his words, Social Security and Medicare benefits,” Schumer said on the Senate floor.

“Are Senate Republicans fine with the terrible things Elon Musk and DOGE are doing to Social Security? Do they agree with Mr. Musk that it’s one giant scam?” he asked.

The White House issued a press release last week in response to the controversy over Musk’s comments declaring: “The Trump Administration will not cut Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid benefits.”

The latest belt-tightening move was announced Tuesday, when Leland Dudek, the Social Security Administration acting commissioner, announced the agency will require millions of recipients and applicants to visit field offices personally instead of calling in to resolve issues over the phone.

In addition, dozens of Social Security Administration field offices across the country are scheduled to close as part of a broader effort by DOGE to shrink the federal government’s footprint.

A second Republican senator who requested anonymity to comment on Musk’s focus on Social Security said DOGE should stay away from the programs, warning that cutting staff and field offices will likely impact beneficiaries, including thousands of seniors, across the country.

“This Congress — Republicans and Democrats — is not going to modify Social Security, it’s not going away. I guess Elon Musk is talking for Elon Musk, because he’s not talking for people in the Congress who have something to do with the future of Social Security,” the lawmaker said. “It’s part of our country and society, here to stay.”

The GOP senator acknowledged, however, Musk “is not going to be quiet,” despite the broad hope within the Republican conference that he would drop the topic.

The source said while “there are positions within every department and agency that ought to be looked at,” Musk’s shoot-from-the-hip approach toward cuts is causing concern on Capitol Hill and back at home.

“What needs to take place is analysis of the task, the mission, the goals, the outcome of what the department or agency is supposed to do, and then right-size the workforce. In some instances, it may mean more employees, if you did it right, and in lots of places it may mean some fewer,” the senator said.

Murkowski said the Social Security Administration is hard-pressed to meet Alaskans’ needs because it only has one field office in her state.

“Our challenge in Alaska is we are remote. We have fought to maintain a Social Security office, one office in the whole state,” she said. “We had to fight to get it back.

“Now, because of all the pressures on it in terms of demand, what you have is, people are no longer able to walk into the Social Security office. They have to call to get an appointment. The wait time then to get an appointment is really discouraging,” she said.

“It’s been really hard. When you suggest that we need to reduce the number of folks that are answering call lines, that are responding to congressional offices like ours, I can tell you it’s not going to go over well,” she warned.